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Correspondence

THE MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN COLLEGE COURSES IN THE MODERN LANGUAGES, A COMMENT

Managing Editor, MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL:

In the Journal for November 1921 appeared a very sane article on the question of the use of the foreign language as the medium of instruction in college courses. The object of the following is not to take issue with the views expressed in the article, but to point out the fact that the writer of the article has not made any new discoveries nor offered any new suggestions. In the Journal for March 1918 an article on Nineteenth Century German Literature for Undergraduates by Frederick W. J. Heuser takes almost exactly the same ground. To go back still further in the past, and to take only one instance, for at least twenty-five years the modern language courses at Harvard have been given on the plan suggested by Mr. Hoskins. That is to say, they are in two groups, one devoted to the literary aspect of the work in which parallel courses offer the student the opportunity to do his work and follow his lectures in either English or the foreign language according to his taste and ability. The other group affords a smaller number of students, who may plan to teach, a chance to study the language from the point of view of conversation or grammar and composition. Furthermore, the scheme suggested as a possible future achievement is one that is already in active operation, though the catalogs may not show it by actual grouping and designation of courses, in more than one state university of the Middle West.

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WHAT IS ANNOTATION?

Managing Editor, MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL:

Since the unwritten law of the land has decreed that literary masterpieces shall be presented to college classes in predigested and guaranteed innocuous form, may we not at least demand that full nourishment be assured from what remains of the original? The question is surely rhetorical, but how is it answered in practice? Too often the first and controlling idea seems to be that annotation should be copious. To this end editors will conscientiously translate every Latin phrase that may have escaped the refining process; they would feel unworthy of their profession if a single "idiom" were left unregistered in the notes for the convenience of the student preparing for his examination. We have all heard students advising each other to "learn the notes and let

the text go hang!" Ability to translate "idioms" on examination is scarcely the fairest test of knowledge, at least with our present text-books, although many teachers confine translation almost entirely to that. At any rate the "notes" should be something more than a mere annex of the glossary. The space might be better used in some attempt at an *explication de textes*. No one will cast doubt on the lack of such annotation among text-books taken in the large, and I shall cite but one example to show one sort of interpretation—the easiest surely—which editors might make profitable use of.

Le Roman d'un Jeune Homme Pauvre has been "annotated" frequently enough in America to permit us to expect something approaching editorial perfection. I have not seen all the editions but the Librarian of Congress has not been able to find in any of the texts the explanation of a simple phrase. Now this phrase cannot fail to strike any careful reader as possessing connotation; the average student finds it "queer" until he knows why it is used. Incidentally he will miss a bit of characterization. Toward the end of the entry dated "25 juillet" the hero related how he was lunching at the house of Mlle Porhoët. She is an elderly maiden lady who traces her ancestry to the mythical kings of Brittany; the most illustrious families in France are proud of alliance with her house. "Mlle Porhoët, qui reste aujourd'hui seule de son nom, n'a jamais voulu se marier, afin de conserver le plus longtemps possible dans le firmament de la noblesse française la constellation de ces syllabes magiques: Porhoët-Gaël.—Les Bourbons," she would say, "les Bourbons sont de bonne noblesse; mais (prenant soudain un air modeste) il y a mieux!" Naturally she was the cause of much amusement among her bourgeois friends, but the heroine of the story, Marguerite Laroque, loved and admired her. Mlle Porhoët has learned that Maxime is distantly related to her family and thereafter calls him "mon cousin" in the grand manner of Louis XIV. The two are lunching together one day at Mlle Porhoët's home when an unexpected visit interrupts them "*Ouvrez, dit gaie-ment en dehors une voix d'un timbre grave et musical; ouvrez, c'est la fortune de la France!*" No student would ever think of greeting a friend in such a manner and consequently is apt to consider Marguerite a freak. But explain to him that she is using playfully a famous "mot historique" to flatter her old friend's whimsies and the "queerness" disappears. May I venture to recall to commentators, contemptuous of legendary lore, that Philippe VI, after his defeat at the battle of Crécy, sought refuge in the château de La Broye, exclaiming: "Ouvres, ouvres, chaste-llains, c'est la fortune de la France!"¹

¹ It matters little that another version, more "historical" perhaps, but certainly less picturesque, makes the king say: "C'est li infortunés rois de France!" Posterity has adopted the mot as Marguerite quotes it.

All literature is of course packed with just such allusions, perfectly familiar to cultivated readers of the author's countrymen, but needing commentary among youthful students beyond the frontiers. I submit that this and similar *explications de textes* can be more profitably used to make annotation copious than the transfer of a portion of the glossary to the notes.

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LANGUAGE SEEN HISTORICALLY

Managing Editor, MODERN LANGUAGE JOURNAL:

Permit me to express my pleasure on noting in your October number the letter of Professor Hacker on the logical subject introduced by *de* in French. For the benefit of any teachers who do not have access to large university libraries, special mention should be made of two studies dealing rather conclusively with this subject, both by Hilding Kjellman:

1. La construction de l'infinitif dépendant d'une locution impersonnelle en français. Des origines au XVe siècle. Uppsala 1913.

2. La construction moderne de l'infinitif dit sujet logique en français. Etude de syntaxe historique. Uppsala 1919.

Any signs of renewed vitality in the study of Romance syntax must be hailed with joy by all sincere lovers of these languages after its seemingly moribund condition of the last few years. No justification of the study of syntax should be needed; the statement of the problem should carry its own convincing evidence with it. The teacher who is not gifted with the probing mind reaches but a slight depth of understanding of his subject, whether that subject is a modern language or one of the sciences. His knowledge tends to become dogmatic and his teaching autocratic if he does not consciously increase their depth and breadth by original investigation not called for in the college schedules. No one can expect the young student, who is being gently led into the labyrinth of scholarship, to arrive at any original explanations of difficult language phenomena; but the student has little chance of later evincing originality or clear thinking in any marked degree unless, under the encouragement of competent mentorship, he is early led to develop them to the extent of his capacity. Surely if the teacher feels neither interest nor responsibility in the matter of knowing the *causes* for the locutions he uses every day, but is on the other hand content with a mechanical and parakeet-like repetition of rules and sounds, the student is being cheated out of one of his most important linguistic birthrights.

It is without doubt one of the few dangerous corollaries of the direct method that the student attains a certain facility in the *rendition* (in its etymological sense of *giving back* to the instructor)